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# Indicators of The Axiological System of Preschool Teachers

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## Abstract

The issue of identifying the values which define the axiological universe of preschool teachers is even more stringent in the context of the global society's moral crisis. The study aims to identify the set of values that define the professional profile of a preschool teacher. The main method we have used was the questionnaire-based inquiry. We investigated a group of 100 subjects, kindergarten teachers, from the urban and rural environments. The questionnaire consists of 8 open-ended items. The results of the study shall enable us to identify the axiological profile of this category of teachers. We shall attempt to use these results in formulating conclusions and suggestions for the processes of initial and continuous training for the teaching career.

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## 1. The kindergarten and the axiological universe of preschool teachers

In relation to previous periods, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> have brought about obvious axiological changes. Excess/hypertrophy has become an increasingly ubiquitous feature. Sevilla (2009) noticed the fact that we now live in a society ruled by king-individualism and the praise of immediate pleasure. The French essay writer observed that “our epoch has placed the individual at the centre of everything” (2009, p. 36). Hyper-individualism (Lipovetsky, 2007) encourages exclusive self-care and indifference towards the others. Hedonism has gained primacy: people want pleasure and live in a constant search of it. Caught in this rush, the entire community suffers the consequences of contemporary hyper-individualism and hyper-hedonism (Sevilla, 2009). In this way: a. “Lacking criteria and reference points beyond one's person, man is left completely to his own, limited to his own impulses, passions and desires” (idem, p. 53); b. Egocentrism divides (idem, p. 87). Family has turned into a kind of “personal business ... to the service of the individual”. Divorce is mere formality. The

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institution of the family is being devalued (idem, p. 73); c. Violence and delinquency are expanding. Sevilla argues that: “The expansion of delinquency is the product of a society dismembered by an individualistic mentality and hedonistic spirit, the decline of authority[of parents, teachers], the rejection of rules, the crumbling of the family, the crisis of the school, the loss of benchmarks, moral relativism” (2009, p. 118). These seem to be just a few of the main axiological coordinates within the boundaries of which preschool teachers have to participate in/contribute to the primary socialization of the young generations. Their values, beliefs, convictions and attitudes play a crucial role in the formation of children. They influence (to a greater or smaller extent) the values, beliefs, convictions and attitudes of the teenagers, young adults and later adults because – as Berger and Luckmann (2008) claim – “the world internalized during primary socialization is more firmly planted in one’s conscience than the worlds internalized later, during secondary socialization” (p. 184). Or, the preschool teachers, with their axiological universe, are part of children’s world. In this complex context, studying the values and the programmes for the axiological training of preschool teachers turns into an essential element in the clarification and enriching of the system of cognitive, moral and aesthetic values, with a view to stating and respecting people as spiritual, cultural and social beings.

## 2. The research methodology

The research is part of a transversal analysis upon the values which define the personality of the Romanian teacher, initiated by us in 2012. After a set of 3 analyses regarding the values which define university teachers, we have shifted our attention to pre-university teachers. This segment of education will be approached vertically, from kindergarten to high-school education, from the same perspective. The present study achieves an investigation upon the axiological profile of a group of Romanian preschool teachers. Its aim is to discover and systematize the values which substantiate the kindergarten teaching process. The research is based on the following general hypothesis: Is there a set of values shared by the preschool teachers, which guides their professional activity? The specific hypothesis is the following: Are there relevant differences between the axiological options of preschool teachers in relation to the period during which they achieved their initial teaching training? The research objectives and their correlation with the items from the questionnaire are: O1 – Identifying the first three values guiding the activity of preschool teachers (items 1,4,5,8); O2 – Identifying a central value for the activity of the trainers in preschool education (items 2,3,7); O3 – Configuring a feasible model of the axiological profile of the preschool teacher. The qualitative research was conducted during the 2012-2013 academic year, on a sample of 100 preschool teachers. The sample structure was constituted according to the criteria of work experience in education. The sample consists of 56% preschool teachers with less than 15 years (marked with E1) and 44% preschool teachers with more than 20 years of work experience (marked with E2). Thus, we attempted to identify possible differences in the axiological orientation of the preschool teachers in relation to their training period, namely before or after 1989, before or after the fall of the communist regime in Romania. The data collection tool was a questionnaire consisting of 8 open-ended items. For the items that required a hierarchization of the respondents’ options, the score of each value was established as follows: 3 points for the value situated on the first position, 2 points for the value from the second position, 1 point for the value situated on the third position.

## 3. Findings

The data collected afforded 8 sets of data, corresponding to the questionnaire items. They will be systematized, analyzed and presented in agreement with the research objectives, to the achievement of which they have contributed. In order to achieve O1, the subjects had to answer the following items: I1 The first three values in which I believe most are...; I4 I believe that nowadays, the most dangerous counter-values are...; I5 I believe that the fundamental values which pre-university education should inculcate to students nowadays are...; I8 The future society needs the following three values... Table 1 is a systematized representation of the collected data:



The analysis of the data from Table 2 shows that: 1. According to O2, we have managed to identify a central value for the activity of the trainers from pre-university education; 2. This value is *professionalism*, cumulating 20% of the respondents' options; 3. The value obtained is in agreement with the previously presented data, being the only shared value obtained within the axiological hierarchization achieved from the perspective of O1; 4. The value of professionalism shapes, happily, the nucleus of the axiological profile of the preschool teacher; 5. If we analyse the central value in relation to the preschool teachers' work experience, we notice that: 5.1. Two central, distinct values were highlighted, namely: for E1, *quality*, 7p; for E2, *professionalism*, 16p; 5.2. There is a shared nominalization of the value of professionalism by the preschool teachers from both age subgroups, but with a relevant difference in options: 4% for E1, respectively 16% for E2; 5.3. Although we may add the option of professionalism as all<sup>nd</sup> rank value for 4% of the preschool teachers from E1, it is still E2 which holds the highest percentage in establishing the central value; 5.4. The value established as central for the entire sample is determined by E2; 5.5. The value of professionalism (characteristic of E2) is properly supported by and convergent with the value quality (a job well done!) (characteristic of E2). The latter is, eventually, the expression of professionalism; 5.6. The value of quality supports and consolidates the value of professionalism; 5.7. The central value expresses the axiological convergence of the two age subgroups from the experimental sample.

Illustrating the viewpoints of the investigated preschool teachers, according to the age subgroups, will be done by resorting to their answers to item 6: If tomorrow were my last meeting with the students, I would address them, as a final message the idea....

E1: Learn, persevere and listen to those around you!; Find your life's dream and follow it!; Be fair, do not lie, do not steal!; Try to be good, patient, tolerant!; Learn from everybody and everything!; Walk with dignity and confidence!; Learn every day!; Education is the most valuable legacy of a people!; Love and respect your parents!; Fight for something!; Be honest with yourselves and the others around!; Be honest, have faith in God, be polite!; Love your fellow human-beings!; Be self-confident!;

E2: Be responsible, help the needy, respect others and do not forget to be human; Be honest!; Be honest, work with dedication and be self-confident; Everything is possible if you try hard!; Be good, hard-working, cheerful!; Be as best as you can!; Be optimistic!; Be yourselves!; Be fair!; Without education you will not be quality people; Small steps lead to great victories!; Be tolerant!; Never let a day pass by without learning something!; Be optimistic in all circumstances!; Be self-confident, have will and the desire to do something; Be responsible, polite, self-confident!; Learn to become what you want!; Help those in difficulty!; Be honest, be fair! Never forget your childhood!; Be strong!

These pieces of advice formulated when saying good-bye to their students reveal the fact that: a. There is no clear difference between the two categories of preschool teachers subjects. Their axiological bases are very similar; b. What they regard as essential for the future generations is that they keep on learning, because learning is the natural state of human beings, fight for one's dreams (and not give in to vain lamentations, disconnected or frivolous preoccupations), be tolerant and honest (as an antidote to the tendency of megalomania and egocentrism), love and respect fellow human beings, show gratitude to their parents, be self-confident, be diligent, tolerant, understanding; c. Life will always edify itself if we take particular care of our soul. Based on these results and in order to achieve O3, we have proceeded to drawing a model of the axiological profile of the preschool teacher. This model (Figure 1) combines the results obtained from the perspective of objectives 1 and 2, according to which the axiological nucleus is the value of professionalism, around which there revolve, converging on the orbit, although with different weights, the first 3 values identified, namely those of respect, work and honesty. Of course, next to them there could also be represented other values, highlighted according to objective 1 (for example, solidarity) or other aspects of professional life raised to the rank of value (competence, education) but, in agreement with the assumed research objectives, our intention was to identify and represent only the first three of them. In terms of the research methodology, we appreciate that: 1. Its purpose was reached, we have identified and systematized the values which substantiate the kindergarten teaching process; 2. All the three objectives have been achieved: O1 – we have identified the first three values which guide the preschool teachers' activity: respect, work, honesty; O2 – we have identified the central value for the activity of the trainers from preschool education, professionalism; O3 – we have configured and represented graphically a model of the axiological profile of the preschool teacher (Figure 1); 3. The general hypothesis – Is there a set of values shared by the preschool teachers, which guides their professional activity? – has been confirmed. The respective set consists of the nucleus-value professionalism and the adjacent values of respect, work, honesty; 4. The specific hypothesis has been invalidated – there are no relevant differences between the preschool teachers' axiological options in relation to the period during which they achieved their initial

teaching training (namely, between those trained before or after 1989, before or after the fall of the communist regime in Romania).

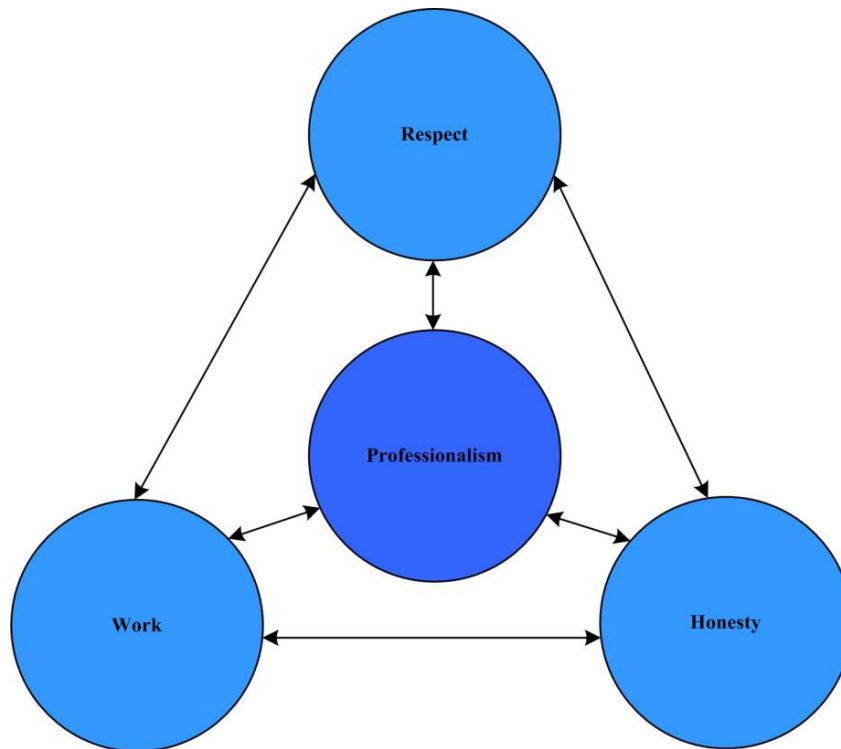


Figure 1 – A model of the preschool teacher's axiological profile

#### 4. Conclusions and future research actions

The research upon the values of the preschool teachers has highlighted the fact that: a. Preschool teachers have a rich, balanced, well-shaped axiological universe; b. All their values revolve around *professionalism*, self-exigency; c. The preschool teachers have solid axiological resources needed to build healthy, tolerant, honest and respectful personalities; d. This professional category constitutes a relevant factor in countering the moral crisis and there is the chance of a future moral life; e. Values such as solidarity, freedom, courage, initiative, creativity, civic involvement are mentioned only to a smaller extent or parenthetically; f. Constant, serious and systematic debates regarding the axiological universe of the teachers are required in order to raise awareness of values and the risk of marginalizing them (cognitive, moral, aesthetic, religious, political-juridical etc.) in the continuous (self)training of teachers and the daily achievement of the educational act.

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